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CHAPTER LVIII

MANDALAY AND RANGOON

[This chapter describes these towns as they were in 1881.]

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AMERICANS talk, and with good reason, of the magic growth of their cities. But for mere mushroom growth, Mandalay might compare even with Chicago itself, and if we are to judge of the progress of a commercial place by the fair criterion of business results, Rangoon may hold up its head in confident rivalry with any of the typical American cities. In the middle of last century the site of Mandalay was swampy paddy land and rank jungle. Now an area of five square miles is covered with houses, many of them squalid enough certainly, and with large patches of unused land round about them, but none the less contained within the city limits. Rangoon came into British hands in 1852, and at that time possessed no commerce worthy of the name, indeed it was only known as the place for pilgrims to the Shwe Dagôn pagoda to stay at, and the residence of the Regent of Pegu, as being the guard station on the most accessible mouth of the Irrawaddy. Ten years later, ships entered or cleared from the port having a tonnage of 295,000 tons, and the imports were worth £1,200,000, the exports £1,400,000, and since that date—a year or two after Mandalay had been founded—the tonnage has increased to 1,000,000, the value of the imports to £5,000,000 sterling, and the exports to £4,000,000. In a quarter of a century the commerce of British Burma rose to nearly £20,000,000 sterling. The population has quadrupled; public works are carried on; education is widely disseminated; the administration is carefully managed by British officials; a railway,

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163 miles long, has been made; there are 1300 miles of telegraph lines; stately law courts and other public buildings have sprung up, and so far from the work being a tax on the Indian Imperial Treasury, British Burma has been, after its first few years, more than self-supporting. For a considerable time it has contributed to the Imperial Treasury a clear surplus of a million sterling. The mere figures are in themselves surprising, but they cannot be truly appreciated unless they are read alongside the obvious, undeniable, and acknowledged prosperity and contentment of the native population. Since the annexation of Upper Burma these figures have been roughly multiplied by ten, and there is a steady yearly increase which would be greater if Burma were allowed to make use of her yearly surpluses.

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As long as there was a king of Burma, Mandalay was a larger town than Rangoon and an infinitely more picturesque one. It still remains by a long way the second town in Burma, but Rangoon has over-passed it in population. While Rangoon has gained, Mandalay has lost, but there seems no reason why it should go on declining.

The mushroom growth of Mandalay was entirely due to an autocratic order, but the number of ancient capitals in the neighbourhood shows that the position is an advantageous one. The astrologers and the king settled the new site between them, and when this was arranged a royal order came out bidding all remove themselves from Amarapura to Mandalay on pain of death in case of refusal. The transference of a bamboo hut is certainly no very great undertaking, and occupies less than a week in the pulling down and setting up. But the hardship was none the less where the people had gardens, or fruit-trees growing in their yards. The Chinese alone remained firm. Their houses were of the usual substantial, heavy, Celestial architecture, and, moreover, they had built for themselves an elaborate joss-house, in splendour quite equal to the best in Rangoon. Consequently, they flatly refused to migrate the two or three miles distance to the new capital. The astrologers were as usual for using force, but Mindôn Min had more sense. The Chinamen were almost all British subjects, and moreover their dealings contributed substantially to the revenue. Their

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